

THE WHITE RIBBON.

—:O:—

EDITOR—MRS SHEPPARD ... BOX 209, CH.CH.

ASSOCIATE EDITOR ... Miss L. M. SMITH

TREASURER AND BUSINESS MANAGER:

MRS W. S. SMITH, 201, Hereford Street, Christchurch.

DISTRIBUTING DEPARTMENT MRS VENABLES

The White Ribbon:

FOR GOD AND HOME AND HUMANITY

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 1897.

A New C.D. Act.

THE excellent address given by Mrs. Sievwright at Gisborne, which we print in our front pages, is a most opportune deliverance. Never was there a time when it was more necessary for the friends of freedom and purity to be on the alert than the present.

Apparently sincere in their efforts to repeal the present C.D. Act, the Government will—it is to be feared—make an attempt to pass a new one, which will—save for a proposed sex equality—continue all the worst features of the present Act.

Upon a suggestion from the Government the Canterbury Medical Society has drafted a new C.D. Act, which has been forwarded to the Premier. It is proposed that the Government should recognise prostitution; that both sexes should be brought under the Act; and that upon the mere declaration of a paid informer (called an inspector), any woman may be compelled to produce a certificate from a medical man saying that she is not suffering from venereal disease. If she does not do this, she shall be examined by a medical man appointed for that purpose. In the new Bill, as in the present Act, there is no provision to protect an innocent, healthy woman from the insult and degradation of an enforced disgusting personal examination by a medical man. The informer is not required to produce any evidence in support of his

or her declaration. The mere declaration that he or she has good reason to suspect a person to be diseased in this particular way is to be sufficient.

There is a difference between the proposed Act and the present one, in that while at present any expense has to be borne by the local body, in the new Act it is to be borne by the colony. The draft of the new Bill was considered by the Canterbury Women's Institute at two meetings specially convened for the purpose.

At each of these members of the Medical Society were in attendance to explain the necessity for such an Act, to receive suggestions, and to obtain, if possible, the support of the Institute. After careful consideration the Institute decided to oppose the Bill for the reasons that (1) "It contains all the worst features of the present Act in its violation of constitutional law; in its system of espionage; in the unlimited powers given to magistrates to cause women to be subjected to gross indignity; in that it proposes to place the modesty and fair fame of any woman or girl at the mercy of an official who may be neither intelligent nor scrupulous. (2) That from the wide experience of the highest and most reliable medical and police authorities in the older countries, it has been conclusively proved that examination is useless as a safeguard against venereal diseases."

We have every sympathy with efforts to reduce disease. But there are some things worse than disease, aye, or even death. For the fair fame, the modesty, and the very liberty of the womanhood of this colony to be at the mercy of the suspicions of paid informers is a monstrous thing, and one that we will protest against with all the energy that we possess. It may be asked, "What will be gained if the Bill should become law?" If space could be spared, the whole of this paper could be filled with

the opinions of medical men in England, India, America, and the Continent of Europe—men who have made a special study of venereal diseases, who have written standard works on them, and who have carefully watched the practical effects of the working of these Acts. Their verdict is that the examination of women is no safeguard against these diseases. We do not question the assertion that syphilis is a disgusting and terrible disease. Its ravages afford confirmation of the axiom that "what is morally wrong cannot be physically right," that Nature will not permit moral laws to be broken with impunity. But there is little doubt that its prevalence and severity have been greatly over-rated. We are told on most reliable authority that syphilis in ten years does not destroy as many as diarrhoea does in one year, and that scarlet fever creates as much devastation in one year as syphilis does in twenty years. It will therefore be seen that the proposal to interfere with the morality and liberty of women is a preposterous one. The Canterbury Women's Institute is worthy of all praise for its investigation of the matter, and for its expressed determination to advocate voluntary hospitals and oppose the proposed new C.D. Act. In so doing the Institute is but voicing the opinion of every woman who has made a real study of the question. We trust that our societies of women will join the Institute in urging upon the authorities the necessity of establishing hospitals for these diseases, and in firmly resisting all attempts to force such unworthy laws upon them.

Two Courageous Women.

In our last issue we made brief reference to the failure of our charitable aid system at Wanganui. Mrs Williamson—who will be remembered by all visitors to the National Council meeting at Christchurch—brought under the notice of the Wanganui Charitable